

Oral Health Linked to Learning

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While we finish munching our Halloween candy, it is important to remember that tooth decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease.

When children do not receive the necessary preventative services, their overall health suffers, as does their ability to learn. Oral health is a critical – but often overlooked – component of overall health and well being among children and adults.

Pain from untreated dental disease can lead to problems in children that affect social interactions, school achievement, general health, and quality of life. Poor oral health can impair speech development in younger children, and in older children, it increases the likelihood of absenteeism. Even essential activities like eating and sleeping can be troubled by dental-related illness.

Over half of our kids age seven to nine experience tooth decay and its detrimental effects, and approximately 51 million school hours per year are lost because of dental-related illness. This is a strong indication that a majority of children are not getting appropriate dental care. Tooth decay and gum disease are infectious, progressive, cumulative diseases that become more complex over time, and which are almost completely preventable.

Oral health problems can largely be prevented through a combination of access to timely dental care services, fluoridated public water systems, school-based dental programs, healthy dietary choices, and daily oral hygiene practices. Early intervention through screening prior to school entry can help prevent the unnecessary loss of learning time and, when problems are detected, can ensure access to care.

There is increasing evidence of associations between oral infections and pre-term, low-birth-weight babies, as well as with conditions like heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and stroke among adults. Learn more about oral health at www.yourmouthmatters.org, because if our kids don't have oral health, they're not healthy.